

User Group CreationField of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to the provision of user groups for mobile terminals, and particularly but not exclusively to the provision of temporary user groups in localised areas.

Background to the Invention

[0002] The creation of user groups, sometimes referred to as buddy lists, is well known. In the art of computer networking, user groups provide for services such as instant messaging.

[0003] It has been proposed that such user groups may be provided for in mobile communications networks, to provide user groups between users of terminals in the network. Given the nature of mobile communications networks, it has been proposed that it would be advantageous to create temporary user groups, where users that are temporarily located in a particular local area, such as attending a conference, may be brought together in a temporary user group.

[0004] Such proposed techniques rely upon network location algorithms in the mobile communications network in order to determine the locations of mobile terminals, and then provide information to a conference provider or such like that pays the mobile communications network service for the identities of the mobile terminals in the conference area.

[0005] It is an aim of the present invention to provide an improved technique for creating user groups in mobile

terminal communities, and particularly for creating temporary user groups.

Summary of the Invention

[0006] According to the present invention there is provided a method of establishing a user group amongst a plurality of mobile terminals, comprising: receiving at a host device, from at least one of the plurality of mobile terminals, an identity associated with each said mobile terminal; and grouping or collecting, at the host device, the identities associated with the mobile terminals, to thereby establish a user group, wherein the said at least one mobile terminal transmits the said associated identities to the host device on a local communication link.

[0007] Preferably the user group is a temporary user group.

[0008] The host device is preferably associated with a mobile communications network, the method further comprising the step of transmitting the user group to the mobile communications network. The mobile communications network may further communicate with the mobile terminals in the user group.

[0009] The method may further comprise dynamically updating the user group. The step of dynamically updating the user group may include receiving, at the host device, an identity associated with a mobile terminal, and adding said identity to the user group. The step of dynamically updating the user group may further include deleting an identity from the user group.

[0010] The method may further comprise storing the user group. The user group may be stored with a characteristic to identify the group. The characteristic may be at least one of a date stamp; a time stamp; a location stamp.

[0011] The plurality of mobile devices may transmit their associated identities to the host device responsive to a request for their associated identity from the host device, wherein the host device transmits said request on a local communication link. The request from the host device may be a broadcast signal.

[0012] The host device may include a mobile terminal.

[0013] The method may further comprise the step, after said grouping step, of transmitting the identities of the user group to the plurality of terminals.

[0014] The local communication link may be a short-range communication link. The short-range communication link may be a radio communication link. The radio communication link may be a Bluetooth link.

[0015] Each of the plurality of mobile terminals may be associated with a mobile telecommunications network.

[0016] The host device may be a mobile terminal. The host device may be a dedicated control unit. The host device may be a computer.

[0017] According to a further aspect of the present invention there is further provided a device for establishing a user group amongst a plurality of mobile terminals, including: means for receiving an identity associated with each of the mobile terminals, said means

being adapted to receive the identities on a local communication link; and means for grouping or collecting the associated identities to thereby establish a user group.

[0018] The local communication link may be a short-range communication link. The short range communication may be a radio link. The radio link may be a Bluetooth link. The short range communication link may be an infra-red link.

[0019] The device may further include means for communicating with a mobile communication system, and means for transmitting the user group to said mobile communication system. The device may further comprise means for storing one or more user groups.

[0020] The device may comprise a mobile telephone, a host control device, or a computer system.

[0021] In a still further aspect the present invention provides a mobile communications system including a device for establishing a user group amongst a plurality of mobile terminals of the system, including a host device for receiving an identity associated with each of the mobile terminals, said host device being adapted to receive the identities on a local communication link, and said host device further being adapted to group or collect the associated identities to thereby establish a user group.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0022] The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawing, in which:

[0023] Figure 1 illustrates an example scenario in which the present invention may be implemented; and

[0024] Figure 2 illustrates the main elements of a host device for implementing the invention.

Description of Preferred Embodiments

[0025] The present invention is described herein with reference to a particular example. However it will be understood by one skilled in the art that the invention is not limited to the example given, and may be more broadly applied.

[0026] For the purposes of describing an example to understand the present invention, an example is given of creating a temporary user group, or buddy list, in a conference environment.

[0027] Referring to Figure 1, the conference environment is generally designated by the dashed area 102. The area 102 represents a physical area within which the conference is being held, such as a hotel complex, and more particularly a room of the hotel complex.

[0028] The conference provider, wishing to establish a temporary user group amongst attendees of the conference, has a computer terminal 104 which is connected via communication lines 108 to a local transmitter/receiver 106. In this preferred embodiment, the local transmitter/receiver 106 is a Bluetooth transmitter/receiver, transmitting and receiving radio signals over a short distance in a localised area, i.e. the area 102 of the conference. Whilst a Bluetooth link is proposed in this exemplary embodiment, in general a short range or local communication link is used. More generally, the invention advantageously uses a communication link not requiring access to a wireless network infrastructure of a mobile communication system. In

a particularly preferred embodiment, the transmitter/receiver 106 is provided in a doorway through which attendees enter the conference.

[0029] For the purposes of the present invention, it is assumed that attendees have a mobile terminal such as a mobile telephone. For the sake of example two mobile terminals 110 and 112 are shown in Figure 1 in the conference area. However in practice a larger number of mobile terminals may be provided.

[0030] Each of the mobile terminals is associated with a mobile communications network, preferably an intelligent network. That is, each of the mobile terminals 110 and 112 is ordinarily connected in a mobile network for the purpose of making and receiving calls, and possibly for the purposes of data transfer. In Figure 1 there is shown, above the dashed line 114, elements of a mobile communication network such as which the terminals 110 and 112 may be connected in. A detailed explanation of such network, or of the connections of the terminals 110 and 112 in such network, is outside the scope of the present invention and will be familiar to one skilled in the art.

[0031] In brief, a serving call state control function (S-CSCF) 118 associated with, for example, the mobile terminal 110 provides services associated with an application server 122 via communication links 126. Other services may be provided by other application servers, such as 120. The application server 122 offers services which need presence information, and obtains presence information from a presence server 116 via communication lines 124. The presence server stores information, e.g. the identity, concerning the mobile terminals present in the network. It

also stores information about who is allowed to access the presence information. If the presence server has not previously needed this information it may fetch it from one or more other servers.

[0032] In accordance with the present invention, each of the mobile terminals 110 and 112 is provided with an additional communication link, additional to the communication links to the mobile communication network with which it is associated, which is compatible with the communication link provided by the transmitter/receiver 106.

[0033] In the preferred embodiment, the communication links of the mobile terminals 110 and 112 are open to receive broadcast messages from the transmitter/receiver 106. In the example of Figure 1, the computer controls the transmitter/receiver 106 to broadcast a registration request. On entering the conference room, or in being present in the conference room, the terminals 110 and 112 receives the registration request signal on their local communication link.

[0034] Provided that the mobile terminals 110 and 112 are configured by their users to respond to such a request, then the mobile terminals 110 and 112 respond to the registration request by providing identification information to the computer 104 via the transmitter/receiver 106.

[0035] In this way, the computer groups or collects information as to the identity of the mobile terminals present at the conference. The mobile terminals may return the identity to the computer 104 as the number associated to the mobile telephone, as a user identity of the mobile

communication network, as the unique network identification code (IMEI number) or other information.

[0036] In a preferred embodiment, the mobile terminals respond to the registration request with the number associated with the mobile terminal. Thereafter, the computer 104 groups or collects a user group consisting of all users who have registered, and possibly transmits the group back to the mobile terminals 110 and 112 using the local communication link. Thereby a user group is quickly and simply created without any need for network communication. Avoiding network access to create a user group in this way minimises costs.

[0037] In an embodiment, the information provided to the computer 104 may be edited before creation of the user group, or multiple user groups may be created, or new information may be merged to an existing group. For example, multiple user groups may be created according to identification information provided by the mobile terminals. Such information may be pre-stored in the mobile terminals or on one or more chips or such like that can be inserted in the mobile terminal and may include the identity of the user's specific interests. Such information may also be obtained at the registration by asking one or more questions, and thus the user's answers could be obtained.

[0038] In a further embodiment, the user group or groups is/are grouped or collected by the computer 104 and not transmitted to the mobile terminals, but rather used by the computer 104 to transmit specific information such as announcements by way of local broadcasts using the transmitter/receiver 106.

[0039] In a further embodiment, the computer 104 may have a connection to a mobile communication network (not shown). Such connection may be via fixed landlines, or via a mobile terminal connection. In such embodiment the computer may transmit the grouped or collected user group list to the network, and the network may use that information to provide networks services to the mobile terminals identified in the group that are specific to the conference. That may be particularly advantageous where the local communication link is used to detect the presence of a user, for instance as they enter a doorway, but where the local communication link is not powerful enough to communicate with the user thereafter. It is also advantageous if the group is used e.g. for sending a message, advertisement or such like to the members of the conference after it has finished.

[0040] The user groups may be dynamically updated based on new mobile terminals entering the area 102. The list may be dynamically updated by deleting mobile terminals which leave the area 102. For example if the transmitter/receiver 106 is in a doorway, the mobile terminal may send a local communication signal as the user leaves a room. Alternatively the computer may periodically update the list, if the local link is powerful enough, by requesting the mobile terminals to confirm their presence.

[0041] The computer 104 may also not only keep a user group of who is currently at the conference, but also keep a user group of who has been at the conference today, in the last week etc. The computer or a mobile terminal may then continue to provide those mobile terminals with services via the mobile communication network in which they are normally connected. For example, the computer or a mobile terminal

could send SMS messages to the mobile terminals in the group.

[0042] Whilst the present invention has been described hereinabove by way of reference to a conference example, it is more generally applicable. For example the invention may be utilised in a restaurant. The owner of a restaurant may then, for example, be able to access a user group of everyone who was in the restaurant on Wednesday night, to notify them of a special offer, e.g. by text message, the next Wednesday night.

[0043] Thus, user groups maybe stored with a characteristic to identify the group, such as a date stamp, a time stamp, a location stamp, for future use.

[0044] Furthermore, the functionality of the local transmitter/receiver 106, and computer 104, may not be provided by a fixed transmitter/receiver and a computer. Alternatively they may be simply provided by a further mobile terminal.

[0045] For example, if a group of users with mobile terminals are in a room, a first user may select a menu option on their mobile terminal to create a temporary user group or buddy list. Responsive thereto, the mobile terminal sends an optional registration request on a local transmission link, which is received by all mobile terminal within range of the local transmission link. The user of any such mobile terminal may then make a selection on the menu on the mobile terminal to send their identification to the first user, e.g. by selecting a send public user identity button on the screen.

[0046] The first user then groups or collects the user group based on the replies, and optionally transmits it to all the other users. In this way a user group is simply created on a single mobile terminal, and then provided to all mobile terminals. Each individual user may then send the user group list to their mobile network for use e.g. by the presence and/or message and/or group and/or similar servers therein to provide user group services.

[0047] It should be noted that the creation of the user group does not require any network access, and therefore does not require the mobile terminals to be connected in the mobile communication network.

[0048] The local transmission link is preferably any short range communication link, for example a Bluetooth link, an infra-red link, or other short-range media. However, any appropriate transmission link may be used.

[0049] Referring to Figure 2, there is illustrated in block diagram form an example of a host device for implementing the present invention. The example host device is generally illustrated by reference numeral 200, and includes a control block 202, a memory block 208, a first input/output device 204 and a second input/output device 206.

[0050] The first input/output device 204 is preferably a communication device for communicating with a mobile communications network, as described in embodiments hereinabove. Thus the first input/output device maybe a GSM, GPRS, UMTS compatible communication device, for example. The first input/output device 204 communicates with

the mobile communications network (not shown) via communications link 216.

[0051] The second input/output device 206 is preferably a Bluetooth communication device, for communicating with the mobile terminals, such as terminals 110 and 112, in the local area. The second input/output device 206 communicates with the mobile devices via a Bluetooth link 218. As discussed hereinabove, the input/output device 206 may in fact support different short-range communications.

[0052] The control block 202 controls the host device to perform the techniques of the present invention as described hereinabove. The memory 208 stores the user groups created by the host device. As discussed hereinabove, the memory may store a plurality of user groups, preferably corresponding to past user groups, as well as any current user groups.

[0053] The control block controls access to memory 208 via lines 210. The control block further controls the first input/output device 204 via control lines 214, and the second input/output device via control lines 212.

[0054] The host device 200 maybe implemented as a dedicated control device. Alternatively the host device may be a mobile terminal such as a mobile telephone. In such case the input/output blocks 204 and 206 are provided by the normal communication means of the terminal. Similarly the control block 202 and the memory 208 maybe implemented using the normal components of the terminal. In a further alternative, the host device may be implemented in a computer system, or a computer system associated with a mobile telephone. Such a computer system may, for example, be PDA.

[0055] Whilst the invention has been described herein with reference to particular examples, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art how the invention may be more broadly applied. The scope of the invention is determined by the appended claims.